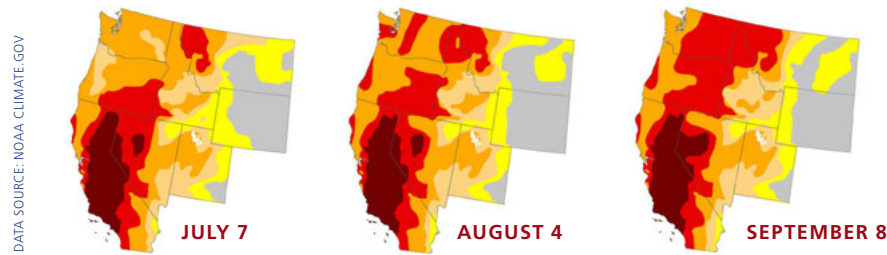


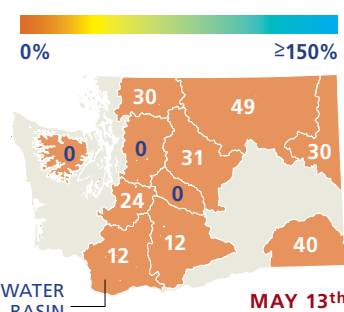
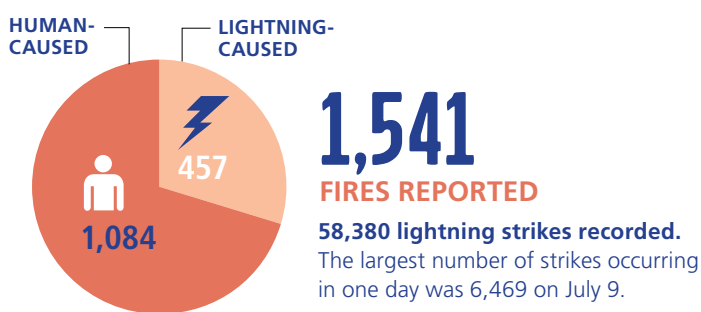
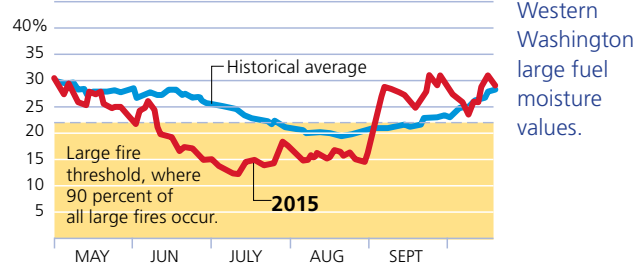
# A record drought, low snowpack and critical fire weather bring Washington's worst-ever wildfire season

**The warmest Washington summer on record.** A vanishing snowpack that left Cascade slopes bare and fish gasping for oxygen in rivers too warm to sustain them. Weeks of critical fire weather, marked by low humidity and strong, gusty winds. Years of persistent drought and hundreds of thousands of acres of ailing and dead trees. These were the conditions that set the stage for Washington's worst wildfire season in human memory, with more than a million acres burned.

## Summer drought worsens



## Fuel moisture drops to dangerous levels



**Mountain snowpacks disappear**  
Snow water equivalents, percent of normal, compared to the median of every May 13 between 1981 and 2010.

DATA SOURCE: USDA/NRCS NATIONAL WATER & CLIMATE CENTER, PORTLAND, OREGON

## A brutal year for wildfire calls us to action



**The immensity of the 2015 wildfire season** revealed itself as summer began. As I walked through Wenatchee neighborhoods annihilated by the fast-moving Sleepy Hollow fire in late June, I saw conditions typical of August. This human-caused wildfire had raced over hillsides covered in dead grasses and descended into neighborhood streets. It blitzed through Wenatchee, with embers borne by hot winds, burning homes randomly and eventually igniting fruit warehouses along the Columbia River.

These explosive conditions were a portent for the rest of the season. The simple act of harvesting wheat would trigger the Blue Creek fire, which threatened Walla Walla's water supply. Lightning would ignite a fire that would burn for months in old-growth rainforest at the heart of Olympic National Park. And three

U.S. Forest Service firefighters would die in a dry canyon of Ponderosa pines near the Twisp River on a terrible wildfire day in August.

About \$347 million was spent fighting Washington's wildfires this year. The estimated total cost to the state will be about \$164 million: the most expensive fire season ever.


We can draw some essential lessons from the experience that must shape how we now prepare for future fire seasons.

**• Our landscape is changing.** Governor Inslee declared a statewide drought on May 15. Our extreme climatic conditions have created a hotter, drier landscape, where natural fire resistance is weakened. The pattern of repeated drought and its effects on the health of our forests mean Washington is now more prone to fire.

**• Wildfire is coming to town.** As wildfires move faster, propelled by changing climatic conditions, more Washington towns and cities will experience flames, embers and smoke as never before. Cities and towns like Wenatchee, Walla Walla, Spokane, Chelan, Winthrop and Okanogan were on the front line of wildfire this season.

**• Preparation is vital.** More firefighting resources, prepositioned in the most fire-prone areas of the state, must be a greater part of our response to fire. We need to provide grants to local fire districts to boost their capabilities. Joint training of volunteers, National Guard troops, and local firefighters alongside professional DNR firefighters is essential. Those forces must be led by experienced fire commanders, using modern radio equipment. We need to thin and maintain our forests, and help homeowners and communities clear away flammable materials to make properties more "Firewise."

The last two fire seasons have changed the way we understand wildfire in Washington. To protect communities and the landscape, we must now commit the resources to preparing for and quickly responding to wildfire. We cannot allow the Evergreen State to become the Wildfire State.

  
**PETER GOLDMARK**  
COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC LANDS



## Wildfire ignites across the state

The Paradise fire in Olympic National Park, the Sleepy Hollow fire in Wenatchee and the Blue Creek fire near Walla Walla ushered in the state's worst wildfire season. Worse was to come August 13-14, when lightning and human-caused starts would set off the Tunk Block, Okanogan Complex, North Star Complex, Grizzly Bear Complex and Chelan Complex fires, burning grasslands and forests in eastern Washington.

**PARADISE**  
Cause: Lightning  
Start Date: May 15  
Acres Burned: 2,796  
In the Olympics, the spring of 2015 was the driest in more than 100 years. Once the rainforest caught on fire, it burned for more than two months.

**CHELAN COMPLEX**  
Cause: Unknown  
Start Date: August 14  
Acres Burned: 88,985  
Smoke blanketed the shores of Lake Chelan, keeping visitors away from one of Washington's most scenic places.

**SLEEPY HOLLOW**  
Cause: Human  
Start Date: June 28  
Acres Burned: 2,950  
An ember traveled more than a mile, burning businesses downtown.

**OKANOGAN COMPLEX**  
Cause: Lightning  
Start Date: August 14  
Acres Burned: 133,707

**TUNK BLOCK**  
Cause: Lightning  
Start Date: August 14  
Acres Burned: 165,918

**BLUE CREEK**  
Cause: Human  
Start Date: July 20  
Acres Burned: 6,004  
Sparked by a wheat combine, this fire threatened Walla Walla's drinking water supply.

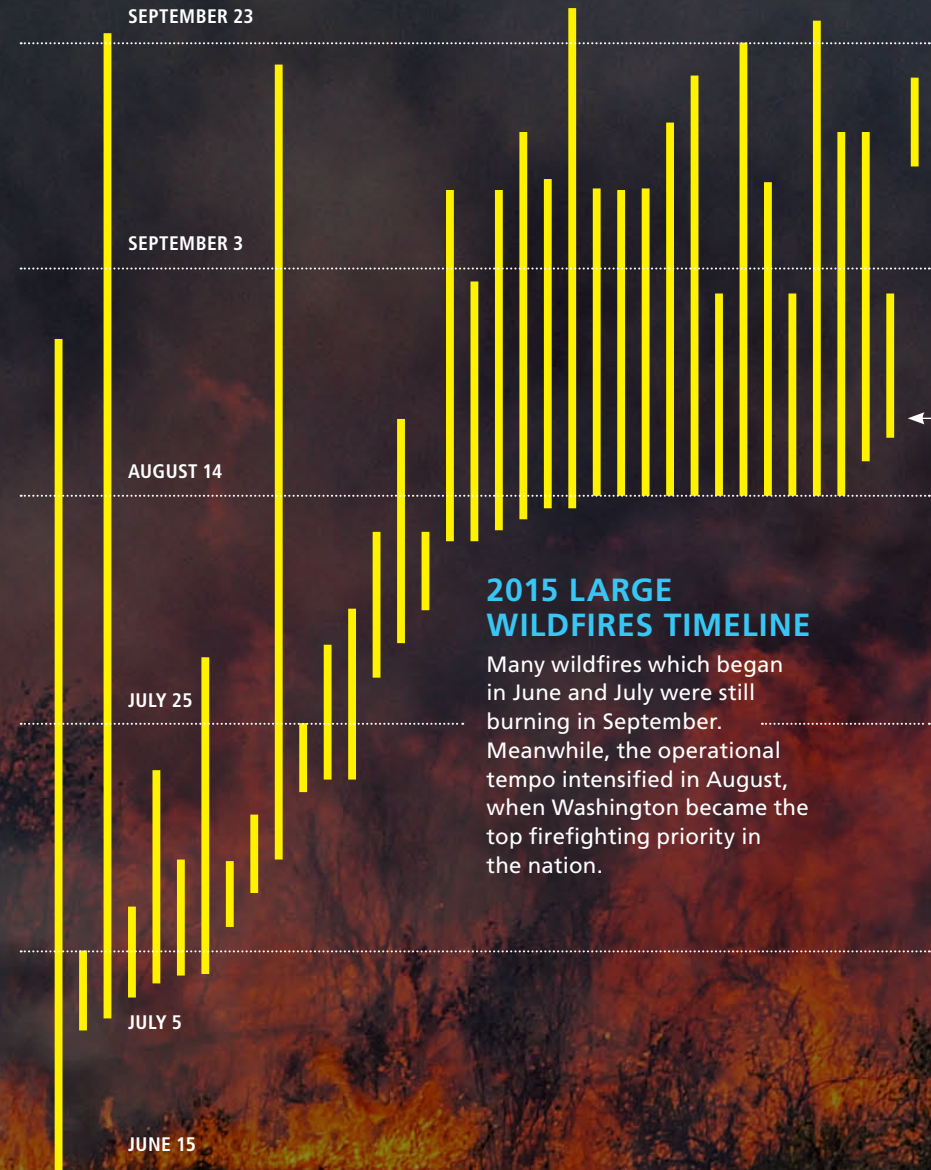
**GRIZZLY BEAR COMPLEX**  
Cause: Lightning  
Start Date: August 13  
Acres Burned: 82,659

**NORTH STAR COMPLEX**  
Cause: Human  
Start Date: August 13  
Acres Burned: 218,138  
The largest fire of the record-breaking 2015 wildfire season, it burned through tribal timberlands.

CARPENTER ROAD  
63,972 acres burned

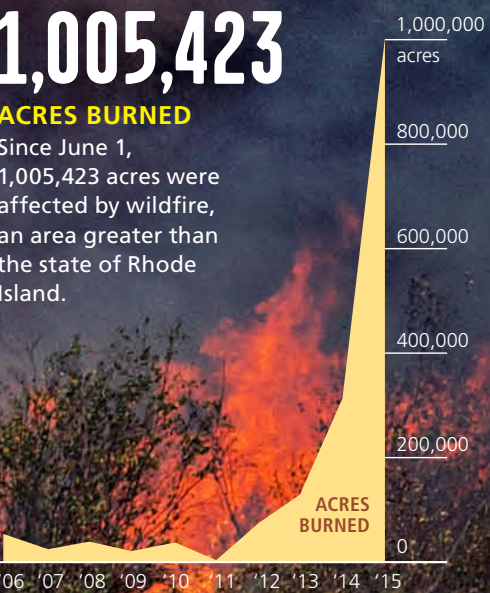
KETTLE COMPLEX  
73,392 acres burned

**Okanogan Complex**  
DNR Highlands 20, Carson Hotshots and Winema Hotshots crews during the burnout operation to stop the fire's northern progression down the Sinlahekin Valley, in Okanogan County.



**2015 LARGE WILDFIRES TIMELINE**  
Many wildfires which began in June and July were still burning in September. Meanwhile, the operational tempo intensified in August, when Washington became the top firefighting priority in the nation.

**THE FIRE SEASON PEAKED ON AUGUST 19, WHEN 22 LARGE FIRES WERE ACTIVELY BURNING ACROSS THE STATE.**



**\$347 million\***  
ESTIMATED TOTAL FIREFIGHTING COST TO DATE IN WASHINGTON STATE

\* ALL JURISDICTIONS, NOT ALL COSTS HAVE BEEN REPORTED.





Thinned forest survives wildfire



▲ Mountain pine beetle (*Dedroctonus ponderosae*) can infest all species of pine in Washington. Shown are lodgepole pines killed by mountain pine beetle in the Loomis State Forest.

## Thinning, controlled burns and Firewise communities can help us prepare to withstand wildfire



Our climate is changing, and our forests are suffering. Approximately

2.7 million acres of the 10 million acres of forestland in eastern Washington faces serious threats to forest health that require active management to resolve. Decades of fire suppression and past management practices that changed the species and structure of these forests have put them at higher risk of damage by disease, insects and wildfire.

As communities expand, homes are being built in many fire-prone landscapes.

Since 2009, the Department of Natural Resources has secured \$30 million to thinning trees and reducing flammable material in our forests. Controlled burns are another tool to improve forest health. DNR works closely with state, federal, tribal and private landowners across eastern Washington to help Washington forests become more resistant to fire.

### COMMUNITIES LIKE WENATCHEE, WALLA WALLA, CHELAN AND SPOKANE WERE ON THE FRONT LINE OF WILDFIRE THIS YEAR



#### Firewise Communities USA Recognition Program

In the last 11 years, Washington has enrolled 124 communities into the "Firewise Communities" program. The program helps homeowners and communities clear away potential fire fuels in yards, on roofs and near homes to reduce the local risk of wildfire.

Learn what you can do to protect your home and community from wildfire. Go to:

[firewise.org](http://firewise.org)

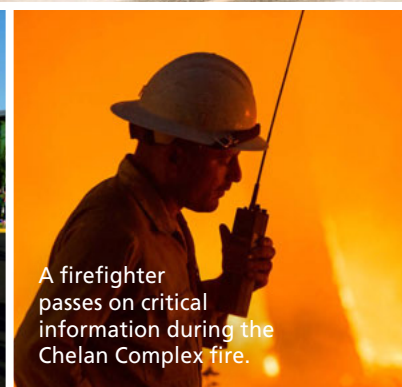
#### Twisp River tragedy

► Three Washington firefighters lost their lives in the Twisp River Fire, which started August 19. U.S. Forest Service firefighters **Tom Zbyszewski, Andrew Zajac and Richard Wheeler** were killed, and their colleague **Daniel Lyon** was seriously injured. Two DNR wildland firefighters **Donny Smith and Reed Callis**, along with DNR contractor **Cutter Rains**, were also injured. Lyon, Smith, Callis and Rains are recuperating.

The Twisp River fire eventually became part of the Okanogan Complex, which included several fires in a 15-mile radius of the town of Omak and immediately west of Twisp in Okanogan County.



Walla Walla residents thank firefighters returning from the Blue Creek fire.



A firefighter passes on critical information during the Chelan Complex fire.



Citizen volunteers deploy shelters as they train in fireline safety at Omak.

### BY AUGUST, MANY REQUESTS FOR FIREFIGHTERS AND RESOURCES COULD NOT BE MET



#### Help fight wildfires

DNR is always looking for dedicated individuals to help protect Washington's natural resources from wildfire.

If you would like to become a firefighter for DNR, find out more at:

[dnr.wa.gov](http://dnr.wa.gov)

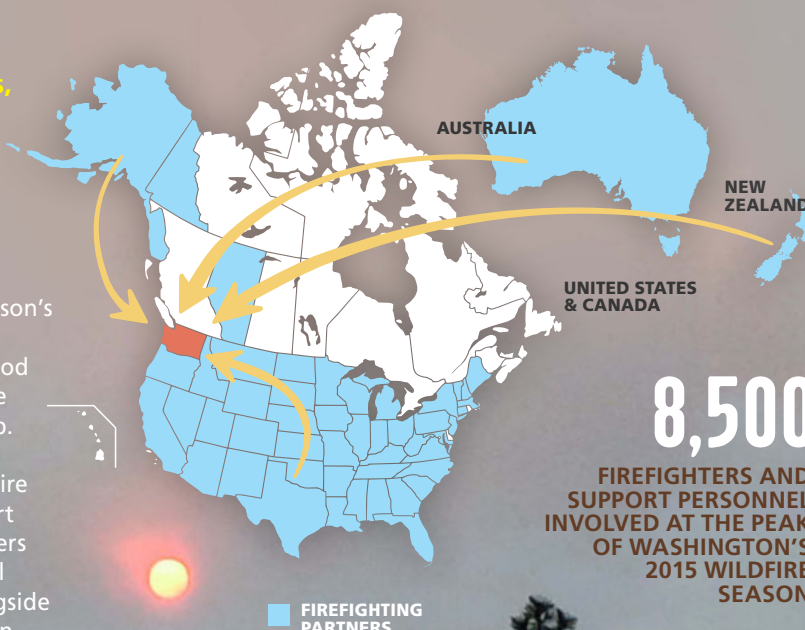
#### Contractors

If you have fire resources available and would like to be on DNR's 'call when needed' list, find out more at: [dnr.wa.gov/CallWhenNeeded](http://dnr.wa.gov/CallWhenNeeded)

#### Help from Washington residents, firefighters across the country and around the world

By August, Washington did not have enough experienced firefighters available to meet this season's overwhelming needs. Washington residents stood in line at volunteer-intake centers to offer their help. Fire officials were able to assign volunteers to the fire lines and essential support roles. About 600 volunteers received training that will allow them to work alongside professional firefighters in seasons to come.

Our firefighting partners across the country, over the border and on the other side of the world also responded to Washington's need. The Canadian provinces of Alberta and Yukon sent firefighters, while almost every state in the Union sent badly needed teams and equipment. Even teams from Australia and New Zealand were summoned to help.



8,500

FIREFIGHTERS AND SUPPORT PERSONNEL INVOLVED AT THE PEAK OF WASHINGTON'S 2015 WILDFIRE SEASON

## Too many fires, too few trained firefighters

